

April, 1 – in the aftermath of elections: some words about the parliamentary majority

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In just a week, all problems relating to election campaign will become minor in both political and social aspects. Different electoral issues and conflicts will enrich technological experience thereby paving the way for numerous appeals and political discussions on such topics as «Who won?» and «How they did it?» Hence, it will take political analysts a long time to study empirical evidence ranging from electoral technologies, inclusive of various tricks and frauds, to deficient national legislation regulating parliamentary elections.

At the same time, it is quite obvious that in the aftermath of elections tension in Ukraine's political life will ease, as a new stage of the country's political history will begin. The nature and consequences of this new phase of historical development will strongly depend on the ability of experienced and new actors to solve traditional problems in relations between the president, government and parliament. The above is especially true about not yet known political forces that will play the major role in the Verkhovna Rada of the 4th convocation.

However, some scenarios of the next chapter of parliamentary activity are rather predictable, since they are generated by deeply rooted and traditional problems inherited from political relations, competition and conflicts of interests of the previous years. Those problems are unlikely to be rapidly and effectively overcome.

As far as efficient work of the new parliament is concerned, structuring of the Verkhovna Rada of the 4th convocation and all possible implications of this process will become the most important domestic policy issues in the near future. Therefore, it is interesting to know what favorites of the election campaign think about the situation in Ukraine after April 1. Realization of goals declared and promises given is imperative. However, should a coalition government be formed, close attention must also be paid to tackling a number of strategic problems, including formation of the parliamentary majority, establishment of cooperation between the Verkhovna Rada, president and government and definition of their responsibilities.

The above strategic issues are especially important in the aspect of the 2004 presidential elections. As this date will approach, relations between legislative and executive power can only get tenser. It is possible to assume that the above will be attended with intensification of competition between various political forces and especially their leaders

running for presidency. In this context, future nominees must concentrate on formation of strong and consolidated parliamentary factions. Participation in formation of the government seems important as well, although there is an apprehension that this issue can become a bone of contention in the new Verkhovna Rada.

Intensification of competition will hardly stimulate consolidation in parliament, which leaves us with an assumption that parliament's decisions will be taken rather by situational coalitions than a stable parliamentary majority. Elections of the leadership of the Verkhovna Rada will most likely serve as a major indicator of the ability of competing political forces to find compromise. Hopefully, this process will take the Verkhovna Rada less time than it did 4 years ago, when Ukraine's parliament could not elect the speaker for almost 3 months.

So, the topical issue of constituting the parliamentary majority will be stronger and stronger influenced by upcoming presidential elections.

Notwithstanding unprecedented number of participants in upcoming elections (33 parties and coalitions), in fact, only 8-9 of them can enter the Verkhovna Rada.

For the time being, the following parties and blocs are potential leaders: Our Ukraine, Communist Party of Ukraine, Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (united), For United Ukraine bloc, Green Party of Ukraine, Women for the Future, and, probably, Yulia Tymoshenko's bloc, Socialist party of Ukraine, and Natalia Vitrenko's bloc. There is a possibility that results of the March 31 voting will be surprising and will alter the above list.

Should Women for the Future bloc win the elections, it will be a real surprise, meaning drastic change in the composition of the Verkhovna Rada. Some experts believe that the same is true about other political parties and blocs, such as Winter Generation Team bloc, pressing for victory by means of waging vigorous advertising campaigns. However, victory of those parties and coalitions will hardly result in political upheaval: most likely, they will act as pro-presidential forces.

At present, according to the list of parties in multi-mandate national constituency, there are 225 deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of the 3rd convocation. Although, taking into account such favorites as Our Ukraine and For United Ukraine blocs, it is possible to expect quite sufficient number of new MPs, who never worked in the parliament.

It is also necessary to consider the fact that 50% of Ukrainian MPs will be elected in one-mandate constituencies. For this reason, parties that failed to collect 4% of votes and enter parliament have an opportunity to join a legislative body due to success in majority constituencies. It is enough to remember previous elections and example of the Reforms and Order Party, the one that had failed to collect 4% of votes but later on managed to form its faction in parliament due to success in majority constituencies. Yet another example is the 1998 faction of the People's Democratic Party that received just 17 mandates. At the same time, the Party's successful activity in majority constituencies

resulted in victory in 11 out of 186 electoral districts, where 9 city mayors who were members of the party received MP mandates. Moreover, at the beginning of work of the Verkhovna Rada of the 3rd convocation, faction of that so-called party of power consisted of 77 members elected as members of other parties and independent candidates. Hence, it is safe to assume that the same situation, i.e. growth of factions due to accession of winners in majority constituencies, could take place in the new Verkhovna Rada. For instance, Volodymyr Lytvyn states that 50% of candidates elected in majority constituencies will represent his bloc. Therefore, there is a real possibility that parties, which failed to collect 4% of votes, will be able to form parliamentary factions. For example, members of the Democratic Union making efforts to form its faction in parliament are likely to seat in the Verkhovna Rada of the 4th convocation.

Also, it is hardly possible to expect drastic changes in the list of MPs elected in majority constituencies. Data of the Central Voting Committee indicate that in 1998, mostly deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of the 2nd convocation were elected MPs in majority constituencies. For the time being, 169 candidates registered in one-mandate electoral districts are deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of the 3rd convocation. So, we will probably see familiar faces in parliament.

It would be expedient to mention that at present, many candidates state that parliamentary majority will be formed. Taking into account developments relating to election campaign, it is safe to assert that for the first time in contemporary Ukrainian history, the parliamentary majority can be not leftist but right-wing and centrist one. Nevertheless, its stability will depend on the ability to make compromises. Should the majority fail to do act that way, it will split into centrists and communists as well as rightists and leftists like in the previous parliament. «We will cooperate with all those, who have sincere heart and common sense», Volodymyr Lytvyn, leader of the bloc For united Ukraine said (the Interfax-Ukraina, March 18, 2002). Such statements leave us with an assumption that this bloc will cooperate with communists as well.

Hence, proceeding from statements of leaders and representatives of parties and coalitions leading in the election campaign, it is possible to visualize the face of the next parliament and its majority.

Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada of the 3rd convocation Ivan Plushch said, «The parliamentary majority will be formed by nearly five political forces and the opposition will consist of two-three parties and blocs guided by the law on opposition to be passed by the next parliament» (the Interfax-Ukraina, February 12, 2002). At the same time, Stephan Havrysh, deputy chairman of the Verkhovna Rada, believes that at present, democratic forces have no program on formation of the parliamentary majority. Neither do the President of Ukraine and the power on the whole. Therefore, in the opinion of Mr. Havrysh, there are three options of forming the parliamentary majority. The first and the best one is to form, in cooperation with the President of Ukraine, the parliamentary majority including such political parties and blocs as Our Ukraine, For United Ukraine, Green Party of Ukraine, Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (united) and other democratic forces. Meanwhile, he mentioned that for the time being, there are few

grounds for formation of such parliamentary majority and that such an option does not seem realistic. Another scenario is formation of the parliamentary majority by communists, who will seat in the Presidium and parliamentary committees. The third option provides for the so-called separate agreements on formation of the parliamentary majority. Stephan Havrysh deems that there is no possibility that the parliamentary majority will be formed on the basis of any mono-bloc, such as, for instance, For United Ukraine (the Interfax-Ukraina, March 11, 2002).

However, members of various mono-blocs do not share opinion of the vice speaker. Incidentally, candidates of the bloc For United Ukraine emphasize that they pin their hopes on formation of the parliamentary majority on the basis of their party. «I am strongly convinced that the future parliamentary majority will be formed on the basis of the bloc For United Ukraine! Our party includes numerous outstanding figures, such as Volodymyr Lytvyn, head of the Presidential Administration and our leader; Volodymyr Semynozhenko, Vice-Premier; many ministers; our outstanding compatriots Mykhailo Hladiy, Hryhoriy Kirpa and Katerina Vashchuk», said Yaroslav Hadzalo, leader of the Lviv headquarter of the bloc For United Ukraine and head of the Lviv regional council (the Vysokiy Zamok, No. 45, February 2002).

The President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma shares the above viewpoint. Furthermore, he favors the idea of forming united centrist party on the basis of the bloc For United Ukraine (the Uriadovyi Kurrier, February 20, 2002).

Meanwhile, it is unclear, whether mono-blocs will be able to retain their membership and continue to exist after the elections. According to some political forecasts, those formations can be somewhat transformed after victory in parliamentary elections. As Our Ukraine and For United Ukraine consist of parties, most of which managed to form their own factions in the Verkhovna Rada of the 3rd convocation, those parties will hardly reconcile with the loss of their parliamentary influence. Not without reason, Popular Rukh of Ukraine and Ukrainian Popular Rukh announced the initial stage of forming strong right-wing centrist majority. As a matter of fact, the above could serve not as the beginning of the unification process but as another bluff. Though, it is possible to assume that should both Rukhs unite, they will hardly get along with Our Ukraine faction despite common interests and positions on definite issues.

Notwithstanding loud-voiced declarations of top figures of the bloc For United Ukraine and its leader Volodymyr Lytvyn, some issues relating to the process of forming the parliamentary majority on its basis still remain uncertain. Recently, the President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma was invited to become the head of this newly formed party. The President was evasive commenting on the above proposal to the mass media. «It is too early to discuss this issue», he said (the Uriadovyi Kurrier, February 20, 2002). In the opinion of Leonid Kuchma, the bloc For United Ukraine should first prove its ability to win elections, form the parliamentary majority and, probably, coalition government.

At the same time, Anatoliy Kinakh, Prime Minister and «Number 2» in the electoral list of the bloc For United Ukraine, was rather skeptical about forecasts that right after

elections or, at least, in fall 2002, a new strong centrist party would be formed on the basis of this coalition. He is convinced that such a «strong democratic and centrist political force» must be formed «from the bottom up, i.e. through understanding of the need for political structuring of Ukrainian society» (the Interfax-Ukraine, March 15, 2002). As far as this issue is concerned, there are more questions than answers today.

In the viewpoint of Serhiy Tihipko, leader of the party «Labor Ukraine», right-wing centrist majority must be formed in the next parliament and it «must include, at least, such parties and blocs as For United Ukraine, Green Party, Women for the Future, Our Ukraine, the Unity bloc and Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (united)» (UNIAN, February 28, 2002). Parties and coalitions willing to form parliamentary majority must work out «a conceptual program of proposals to be made». Among those proposals Serhiy Tihipko mentioned issues relating to development of market reforms and democracy. Moreover, Sergiy Tihipko deems that «definite approach to distribution of offices in both parliament and government» serves as another prerequisite for formation of the parliamentary majority. «Those two directions are crucial for reaching an agreement», he said (the Interfax-Ukraine, March 18, 2002).

However, it will be extremely difficult to find common solutions to the above issues. It seems that problems can arise as early as at the stage of determining objects of political auctions. «I would not like to form any parliamentary coalitions following the schemes like «we will support your nominee for Speaker if you vote for our nominee for Minister of...», Volodymyr Lytvyn, leader of the bloc For United Ukraine said (Interfax-Ukraine, March 18, 2002). Head of Presidential Administration evidently fears that political forces represented in the new parliament may come to agreements based on personal or narrow partisan interests. At the same time, everybody understands that compromises will have to be reached anyway.

Roman Bezsmertnyi, political coordinator of Our Ukraine, is sure that the bloc will not be able to win 226 deputy mandates and form parliamentary majority on its own. «For this reason, we will conduct negotiations with other political forces represented in parliament, on a parity basis, to discuss the problems relating to formation of the government», he said (Forum, March 20, 2002). Recognizing that Our Ukraine will differentiate between temporary allies and strategic partners, Roman Bezsmertnyi claims that the bloc is ready to cooperate with all parliamentary factions but communists. It seems, though, that such cooperation will be subject to different conditions. For example, Viktor Yushchenko «will not agree to form parliamentary majority in cooperation with the bloc For United Ukraine if the latter insists on preservation of the Kinakh cabinet and opposes any personnel changes in the government (UNIAN, February 8, 2002). Meanwhile, the Prime-Minister himself «rather philosophically considers» pessimistic forecasts stating that he will hardly stay in power after the parliamentary elections.

Other potential participants in the parliamentary majority also have their own viewpoint on conditions and procedure of its formation as well as subsequent consolidation. According to leader of the SDPU(u) Viktor Medvedchuk, his party can form majority in the new Ukrainian parliament together with For United Ukraine Bloc, Green Party of

Ukraine and Women for the Future (UNIAN, February 14, 2002). Opposing Viktor Yushchenko's negative attitude to the Kinakh cabinet, Medvedchuk stresses that the SDPU(u) supports the government, has no reasons to and will not change this viewpoint regardless of positions of other political forces. «I don't think we need new Prime-Minister», he said (UNIAN, February 14, 2002).

According to another potential MP Oleksandr Moroz, the Socialist Party of Ukraine is going to cooperate with Yulia Tymoshenko's bloc and her party Batkivshchyna as long as leader of these organizations remains in opposition to power (Interfax-Ukraine, March 14, 2002). At the same time, socialists count on cooperation with some groups within the Communist Party and those parties within Our Ukraine that strive for changes (Interfax-Ukraine, March 14, 2002).

Proceeding from the above statements of political leaders and their attitude to consolidation and structuring issues, we can conclude that, at the initial stage, only situational majority can be formed in the new Ukrainian parliament and no strategic coalitions will be established. Some political forces currently competing for votes are likely to confront each other in the upcoming presidential elections and relations between them can further deteriorate. Hence, although the left are no longer indisputable favorites, taking into account unstable nature of would-be parliamentary coalitions it is possible to assume that on April 1, 2002, political situation will not be much different from that on April 1, 1998.